

The Concept of *Ābhāsa* in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*

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Introduction

Studying classical Indian philosophy poses multiple challenges. One of them is the shift in the meaning of terms at different times, and another is the application of the same term with a different intent in different schools of philosophy. It is not easy to recover the meaning of each and every term used in all different contexts to resolve this crisis. In the midst of applications, what is meant becomes blurred. Textual interpretation becomes impossible, if it is argued that terms have the potency to denote every possible meaning. Understanding a text, therefore, is a negotiation among potential meanings. One can see this fluidity particularly vibrant in the case of the technical terms having different meanings when they are applied in different philosophical contexts. The term and the concept for discussion in this essay is *ābhāsa*. I offer 'appearance' as a provisional translation for this term, although this study will reveal that this term is applied in various and often contrasting philosophical contexts.

The term *ābhāsa* appears in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra Buddhism, the Advaita of Śaṅkara, Trika Śaiva philosophy, and in the text, the *Mokṣopāyaśāstra* (MUŚ) or its redaction, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (YV).¹ The centrality of this term in discussion on Indian philosophy becomes even more crucial with two of the aforementioned schools, Trika Śaivism and the Advaita of Śaṅkara, having a specific doctrine based on the formulation of this term: *ābhāsa* (*Ābhāsavāda*). Within Śaṅkara's school of Advaita, the stream of the philosophy identified with *Ābhāsa* is attributed to Sureśvara, the disciple of Śaṅkara. Somānanda and Utpala are credited for the monistic *Ābhāsa* doctrine of Śaivism.

The objective of this essay is not to compare all these schools of philosophy. However, one point is crucial to initiate this conversation. The Buddhist models of both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra utilize the term *ābhāsa*, explicitly saying that duality is non-existent and compared with illusion, mirage, or perceptual error. Trika Śaivism defends its monistic stance by propounding that duality is the play of consciousness or an expansion of the intrinsic powers of the singular reality. Advaita Vedānta defends its non-dualism by rejecting duality while confirming the substrate of the perception of duality as the Brahman. Both the Buddhist and Upaniṣadic philosophical schools utilize examples like dream, the snake perceived in rope, mirage, perception of a bundle of hair in front of the eyes, a shell perceived as silver, and so on. They interpret it either with the confirmation of the substrate through negation or with an application of the negative terms in order to simply negate. The application of *ābhāsa* found in all these contexts cannot be reduced to a single meaning. A broader

¹ For references on YV, see Vasudeva Laxmana Sharma Pansikar (Ed.), *Yogavāsiṣṭha, with the Tātparyaprakāśa commentary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 (1918).

historical context becomes one of the most essential parts of the hermeneutic exercise for unraveling the hidden sense of language.

Deriving meaning applicable to one specific school of philosophy is not as complicated as understanding texts that have gone through multiple redactions and multiple shifts of the paradigm itself. The context here is of MUŚ/YV. These almost-identical texts come with two different titles, the *Mokṣopāyaśāstra* and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*; it has been edited and rewritten to include *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* and other versions of concise rewriting of the text. This is an epic with profoundly aesthetic compositions as well as a philosophical text. During the period of its composition, the text embodied most of the monistic and non-dualistic ideas and texts available at that time, including the Upaniṣadic literature, the epic compositions of Kālidāsa, linguistic philosophical treatises such as *Vākyapadīya*, the Buddhist Madhyamaka or Yogācāra literature, and texts of the school of Trika Śaivism. Reducing meaning to one single nuance for a word that is an anthology of broadly ranging concepts in its own historical context is therefore inappropriate. This being the case, the best approach is to discern the variations, analyze them separately, find the supporting philosophy for deriving such meaning, and endeavor to find an overarching philosophy if the text so provides. Without reducing various meanings to one sense, this approach allows the author/authors to define meaning within the boundry of specific understanding without a superimposition of inapplicable meaning.

The Scholastic Advaita Concept of Ābhāsa

The Advaita of Śaṅkara predates both Trika Śaiva doctrine and MUŚ/YV. Although there are unmistakable imprints of Buddhist texts in the application of *ābhāsa* in the Advaita of Śaṅkara, the meaning shaped in this school plays a vital role in determining its application in subsequent Hindu literature. Before identifying the instances of *ābhāsa* found in MUŚ/YV, it is therefore essential to introduce key concepts found in the Ābhāsa school of Advaita Vedānta to the discourse. Select applications in the school of Śaṅkara that are crucial to the current discussion on *ābhāsa* are:

1. Following the application of *anābhāsa* in the commentary upon *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad* attributed to Śaṅkara, the term *ābhāsa* refers to an appearance of imagined objects.²
2. Śaṅkara repeatedly uses this term in *Upadeśasāhasrī* (US) with the meaning that *ābhāsa* is ‘false.’ (US 18.115; 18.88).
3. The application of *ābhāsa* in US parallels another term, *pratibimba*. (US 18.88, 114). In this identification, *ābhāsa* is the counter-image of ‘seeing’ or consciousness (US 12.6). In the later scholastic Advaita of Śaṅkara, *pratibimba* and *ābhāsa* doctrines are sometimes recognized as identical and at other times are seen as contradictory. The parallel found in these instances opens up the possibility of bridging these two models of Advaita. This identification facilitates a comparison of *ābhāsa* with an example given by Suresvara, where

² *anābhāsam na kenacit kalpitena viṣayaṇāvabhāsate* | *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad-bhāṣya* 3.4.

he compares the destruction of *ābhāsa* with the destruction of the substrate, such as the counter-image of the sun seen in a pot full of water.³

4. Suresvara is credited with propounding the Ābhāsa doctrine of Advaita. He is consistent in using the term *ābhāsa* to refer to entities that are distinct from pure consciousness.⁴
5. Contrary to these instances, Ānandagiri uses the term *ābhāsa* to refer to the subject of awareness, with an etymological interpretation of the term, ‘*ābhimukhyenāhamityāparokṣyeṇa bhāsata ity ābhāsaḥ*’ (*ābhāsa* is that which manifests directly [in the form of] I-sense).⁵
6. The application of the term *avabhāsa* in Śaṅkara’s commentary upon *Brahmasūtra* (BSBh) and its interpretation by Vācaspati⁶ comes closer to the understanding of *ābhāsa*, in which the term refers to a falsely appearing entity that is sublated with the rise of true knowledge.
7. Sometimes the application of *ābhāsa* gives an Advaita understanding of cosmology, with *ābhāsa* being both cause and effect. Adopting this hierarchy, the consciousness manifesting in the form of subject is the ‘cause *ābhāsa*’ and the consciousness appearing in the form of the objects of cognition are identified as ‘effect *ābhāsa*’.⁷
8. Within Śaṅkara’s school of Advaita, whenever the terms *ābhāsa* and *pratibimba* are contrasted, the term *pratibimba*, referring to counter-image, is identified with *bimba* (image) and is therefore real, whereas the term *ābhāsa* is described as *anirvacanīya* and compared with the substrate of illusion and therefore is identified as ‘false.’⁸
9. A clear distinction can be made between *pratibimba* and *ābhāsa* on the basis that *avidyā* is often identified as *ābhāsa* but never as *pratibimba*. This again confirms that *ābhāsa* refers only to the substrate (*upādhi*), which is not the case with *pratibimba*.⁹

Many of these applications, including that of the fluid interchangeability between *pratibimba* and *ābhāsa*, predate the Advaita literature of Śaṅkara and predominantly follow the applications found in the Yogācāra literature. It is therefore contextual to analyze select applications of the term *ābhāsa* found in Buddhist literature.

³ *buddhyādikāryasamhāre pratyakcāitanyarūpiṇaḥ | cidbimbasyāpi samhāro jalārkapraṇilāpavat ||* *Brhadāranyakopaniṣad-Bhāṣya-Vārttika* (BĀUBhVā) 4.3.1174.

⁴ BĀUBhVā 2.3.191; 2.1.4; 4.3.73.

⁵ *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya-Ṭkā* 6.3.2.

⁶ *avasanno ’vamato vā bhāso ’vabhāsaḥ* (Bhāmati 18.7, Joshi ed.).

⁷ “*Śāṅkarādvaitasammata ābhāsavada*” by Satyadeva Misra, *Rtam* 1-1 (July, 1969), Lucknow: Akhila Bharatiya Sanskrit Parishad, 29-39.

⁸ Mishra 1969, 34.

⁹ Mishra 1969, 34.

Ābhāsa in Buddhist Literature

The application of *ābhāsa* in Buddhist literature ranges from that found in the Madhyamaka texts to the Yogācāra literature. While ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*) remains at the core of both doctrines, Madhyamaka emphasizes the negation of phenomena by application of the term *ābhāsa* in order to confirm *śūnyatā*. In the case of Yogācāra, *ābhāsa* is applied in order to establish that external entities are merely the *pariṇāma* of *vijñāna*. For the Yogācāra understanding of the term, Schmithausen explains it as: “. . . corporeal matter and the external world, as the object of *ālayavijñāna* . . . mental images in *ālayavijñāna*.”¹⁰

The instances found in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* (MSA) of Asaṅga and the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS) are crucial to an understanding of the early Yogācāra application of *ābhāsa*. In MSA, the term can mean something falsely appearing and non-substantial. It frequently appears as *dvayābhāsa*, or the *ābhāsa* of the dyad of subject and object.¹¹ In the examples found in these texts, *ābhāsa* is explained as the non-being of the substance for which the term *ābhāsa* is referring to.¹² The substrate for the rise of the dyad is the storehouse consciousness and it is caused by *avidyā*.¹³ The application of the term *advayābhāsa* in MSA does not confirm the appearance of *advaya*, but rather, it is applied in order to negate the appearance of the dyad of subject and object (*dvayābhāsa*).¹⁴

In response to what this *dvayābhāsa* is, MSA explains that it is mind or *citta* alone that is acknowledged in terms of *grāhya* (object of cognition) and *grāhaka* (subject of cognition). In absence of mind (*citta*), there is no causal constituent such as passion, and in absence of the causal complex, there is no rise of subject and object.¹⁵ This is the appearance of passion or aversion, or the appearance of the properties of the other that give rise to the duality of the form of subject and object.¹⁶ The application of *ābhāsa* in MSA appears to be synonymous to the term *pratibhāsa*.¹⁷

MSA elaborates upon the ontology of *ābhāsa*, with *ābhāsa* in the form of subject and object giving rise to their own sets of triads: three categories emerging

¹⁰ Schmithausen 1987, 203. See, *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*. Part I: Text, Part II: Notes, Bibliography and Indices. Studia Philologica Buddhica Monograph Series IVa. and IVb. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1987.

¹¹ *dvayābhāsā iti grāhyagrāhakābhāsāḥ* | MSA 11.32.

¹² *dvayābhāsātāsti dvayabhāvaś ca nāsti* | MSA 11.21; *dvayābhāsātāyā bhāvaḥ sa eva dvayasyābhāva iti* | MSA 11.22.

¹³ *svadhātuto dvayābhāsāḥ sāvidyākleśavṛttayaḥ* | MSA 11.32.

¹⁴ MSA 11.33.

¹⁵ MSA 11.34.

¹⁶ MSA 11.35.

¹⁷ MSA 11.35.

from the appearance of subject and another three, from the object. The first triad, the appearance of word (*padābhāsa*), meaning (*arthābhāsa*), and body (*dehābhāsa*) is considered as the triad belonging to the subject of perception (*grāhaka*). The next triad, the appearance of mind (*manas*), fivefold sensation (*udgraha*), and mental modification (*vikalpa*), is considered to belong to the object of cognition (*grāhya*).¹⁸ This categorization falls under *paratantra*, or the interdependent character among the three essential natures discussed in Yogācāra literature.¹⁹

Explicitly, all instances identified in this discussion fit with a general application of the term *ābhāsa* as false appearance and attributed to ignorance. Both of these categories are applicable to the scholastic Advaita of Śāṅkara whenever the term *ābhāsa* has been applied. This understanding is also consistent with some applications of the term in MUŚ/YV.

It has been previously addressed that the application of the term *ābhāsa* in Buddhist literature aligns with both the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra positions. In order to elaborate upon the Yogācāra application of the term *ābhāsa*, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS) is crucial. This text describes *ābhāsa* in terms of the appearance of external entities, with ‘false appearance’ describing external entities that stand for confirmation of essential *viññāna* nature. The concept of inside and out, *viññāna* and *artha*, or other dyads, serve the same purpose. This application does not contradict with that found in the scholastic Advaita of Śāṅkara. In this particular case, Yogācāra terminology has apparently shaped the Upaniṣadic discourse of Advaita. LAS considers the appearance of entities due to the union of *ābhāsa* and *bīja* (LAS 10.495). Apparently, the seed (*bīja*) here refers to ignorance (*avidyā*) and mental imprints (*vāsanā*), as found in MSA. The application of ‘the appearance of false entities’ (*mithyābhāsa*) (LAS 10.147) further confirms the argument that this *ābhāsa* is false. In the context of Yogācāra application, this confirmation of falsity leads to the final confirmation of emptiness (*sūnyatā*), which remains the foundational concept for both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra doctrines.

In agreement with the application of *ābhāsa* as false appearance, variants of this term are often associated with *artha* or *bhāva*, referring to entities outside of the mind. The appearance of these entities (*arthābhāsa*) is compared with the improbable rabbit-horn (LAS 10.571), which simply applies to something that does not exist. It is not the case that something else is being mistaken for the horns of a rabbit. This example may have been borrowed from the Madhyamaka usage. The objective of Yogācāra in providing for the illusory nature of entities is not to reject their false appearance. The examples such as shell-silver, or rope-snake demonstrate the illusory nature of the entities that appear, without rejecting their substrate.

In the instances where *arthābhāsa* is used in LAS, it explicitly refers to something that appears but does not exist (LAS 10.571-573). The appearance of entities is caused due to not knowing one's own mind (LAS 10.273). When the mind

¹⁸ MSA 11.40. For the first triad, see also MSA 11.44.

¹⁹ For treatment on three characters (*svabhāva*), see *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* of Vasubandhu.

is stimulated by impressions, entities appear (*bhāvābhāsa*, LAS 2.158).²⁰ The illustrations applied in these contexts need to be read in light of the overarching philosophy, and in this case, examples such as rabbit-horn confirm the Yogācāra doctrine of mind only (*cittamātra*).

While the appearance of entities is due to the mind manifesting external entities because of mental impressions, the true nature of mind is devoid of appearance. This reality is often identified by the term *nirābhāsa*. This *nirābhāsa*, devoid of appearance, gives rise to eight-fold cognition (*aṣṭadhā vijñāna*) (LAS 10.354, 644).²¹ In another depiction, a yogin perceives the great path (Mahāyāna) by abiding in *nirābhāsa* (LAS 10.235, 257). It is *prajñā* or wisdom that leads to attainment of this state of *nirābhāsa* (LAS 2.180; 10. 285).²² In this state of *nirābhāsa*, the mind is free from objects, and there is no sequence because there are no entities (LAS 10.206-7). One can achieve this *nirābhāsa* by surpassing mind-only (*cittamātra*) (LAS 10.110). In agreement with the Yogācāra ontology of the eightfold analysis of mind, *citta* is explained as having seven grounds, with *nirābhāsa* considered to be the eighth (LAS 4.2). This enlightened state of mind not only frees a yogin from the external entities of appearance, but also from defilements that cause the mind to appear in form of the dyad of subject and object.

Ābhāsa in the Mokṣopāyaśāstra/Yogavāsiṣṭha²³

The illusory nature of *ābhāsa* is consistently found in both Buddhist sources and Advaita literature, where this term refers to a product of ignorance which is caused due to one's mental impressions. The main distinction between the Madhyamaka application of *ābhāsa* and the use of *ābhāsa* in YV is that in the case of the first, there is no substrate for *ābhāsa* whereas in the second, there is *cid* or consciousness that is appearing otherwise.²⁴ This brings the meaning of *ābhāsa* comparatively closer to the Yogācāra application. However, the difference in overarching philosophy determines the difference in the application of these terms. The Madhyamaka application of *ābhāsa* is not identical to its application in the YV in the sense that this term, in the case of the Madhyamaka usage, describes what is non-existent and confirms negation, whereas in the case of YV, even when the term is describing illusory appearance, it is not used in simple negation but rather as confirmation of the substrate. For instance, the example of mirage in YV confirms the existence of sunlight.²⁵ Select examples to establish this argument follow:²⁶

²⁰ This is also addressed as *visayābhāsa* LAS 10.217.

²¹ See also LAS 2.99, 123, 128.

²² The application of *anābhāsa* is synonymous to *nirābhāsa*. See LAS 10.94.

²³ I am thankful to Jurgen Hanneder for providing valuable references on the *Mokṣopāyaśāstra*.

²⁴ For instance, see: *cidākāśam eva bhāti jagattayā* | YV Nirvāṇa 29.142.

²⁵ *brahmaiva jagadābhāsam marutāpo yathā jalam | brahmaikālokanāc chuddham bhavaty ambu yathātapaḥ* || YV, Nirvāṇa I, 47.22-23.

²⁶ In addition to the examples discussed above, following are significant to confirm this concept:

*yathā saṅkalpanagaram saṅkalpān naiva bhidyate |
tathāyaṃ jagadābhāsaḥ paramārthān na bhidyate ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa II 42.20

[Just] as the city [constructed] of intention does not differ from the intention (*saṅkalpa*) [itself], so also does the appearance of the world not differ from the supreme reality.

*yad idaṃ jagadābhāsaṃ śuddhṃ cinmātravedanam |
kātraikatā dvitā kā vā nirvāṇam alam āsyatām ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa II 43.12

The appearance [in the form of] this world is pure [and of the character of] the awareness of consciousness only. In here, what is singularity or duality? Abide in the state of enlightenment. This is all (*alam*).

For comparative understanding, this essay explores first, the instances of the application of *ābhāsa* in MUŚ/YV that align with the Buddhist understanding of the term and second, the instances in which the meaning differs. It is expected that congruence in the application of the term and the concept of *ābhāsa* exists, at least within this text itself. Jurgen Hanneder points out that ‘to appear’ (*bhā*) is ‘to be perceived erroneously,’ citing a verse from MUŚ which explains that the perception of duality is not rooted on cause, and what appears is not really there.²⁷ This rejection of substantiality of appearance tallies with the previous instances which assign appearance to ignorance, because what appears due to ignorance is not present in reality. Hanneder cites other instances where *ā+bhā* is explained in terms of false appearance, like a bundle of hair due to eye disease. He compares these instances with the widely cited first verse from Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*.²⁸ Explicitly, there is a parallel between Yogācāra and Advaita literature where both explain *ābhāsa* and *avabhāsa* synonymously.

sad evāsambhavaddvityaṃ mahācinmātrakam tu yat || viśvābhāsaṃ tad evedaṃ na viśvaṃ san na viśvatā || YV, Nirvāṇa II 42.16 .

eka evaiṣa ābhāsaḥ sabāhyābhyantarātmakaḥ | ā samudraṃ nadīvāhaśatasāṅghamayātmakam || YV, Nirvāṇa II 43.38.

cidvyomaśūnyatārūpamātra ābhāsa ātataḥ | idam apratighaṃ śāntaṃ jagad ity eva bhāsate || YV, Nirvāṇa II 161.14.

ābhāsamātraṃ drśyātma cinmātraṃ śāntam avyayam | sthītam āsthāḥ kim etasmin svabhāve sve vicāryate || YV, Nirvāṇa II 163.31.

□□ *nirmūlam eva bhātidam abhātam api bhātavat | tasmād yad bhāsuram idaṃ tat tad eva padaṃ viduḥ ||* YV Nirvāṇa II 163.28.

“Although without a cause, this [world] appears; although [it has] not appeared, it is as if [it had] appeared. For this reason, what is appearance is this [world] (*idam tat*), the same (*tad eva*) is known as supreme (*para*)”. Translation by Jurgen Hanneder, *Studies on the Mokṣopāya*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006, 145-146.

□□ Hanneder 2006, 146-147. The verses from MUŚ cited by Hanneder in this context are MUŚ 6.284.4; 6.284.2; 6.262.14.

Illustrated with numerous examples and explained repeatedly, the central concept of *ābhāsa* describes the non-substantial nature of the world that is perceived. The application of *ābhāsa* is in order to reject any origination.²⁹ Both perceiver (*draṣṭṛ*) and perceived (*drśya*), following the *Ābhāsa* terminology, are merely appearing and of the character of error.³⁰ Within this setting, both the external entities (*bhāsa*) and their appearance (*vibhāsana*) are understood by the terms derived of the verbal root $\sqrt{bhās}$.³¹ The concept that something fundamentally real exists, with false appearances taken to be reality is a concept that gives rise to the notion of two degrees of truth, as found in both Mahayāna Buddhist literature and scholastic Advaita. Although this is not the only way the Advaita tradition interprets the phenomenal world while establishing non-dual Brahman, the doctrine of *Ābhāsa* fundamentally relies on this twofold reality. To confirm this understanding, MUŚ applies *ābhāsa* in the sense that it is real in its appearance, and not real otherwise. This is compared with the reality of bubble in the sense of bubble and not real otherwise. ‘Body’ is real in the sense of the body and not real in any other sense.³²

When *ābhāsa* is applied to reject illusory appearance, it is often used to stress the non-existent (*asat*) aspect of what appears. This non-existent nature of illusory appearance comes from the understanding that ignorance (*avidyā*) is in fact non-existent. In this understanding, error and ignorance are identical, and non-existing ignorance gives the appearance of something having existence.³³ Within this setting, *ābhāsa* rejects the phenomenal being of the world in any mode of time, without rejecting the substrate in which the world appears, consciousness itself.³⁴ Following this, the world that is perceived is an error (*bhrama*) because it is *ābhāsamātra*, or appearance alone.³⁵ This application of *ābhāsa* rejects origination as such. That which appears as if existing, following this description, is never originated and there is therefore no cause of origination.³⁶ This *ābhāsa* is compared with dream, and consciousness that is compared to the void is alone the witness of the apparent

²⁹ YV Nirvāṇa II, 106.34.

³⁰ YV Nirvāṇa II, 106.35.

³¹ *mānasī kalanā yena yena bhāsām vibhāsanam* | MUŚ Utpatti 9.75 and Bhāskaraṇṭha's commentary there as: *yena bhāsām ghaṭādijñānānām* | *vibhāsanam sphuraṇam* | *bhavati* |

³² *pratibhāsavidhau dehaḥ sann asaṃś cānyadā smṛtaḥ* || *ābhāsamātram evedam itthaṃ samprati bhāsate* | YV Nirvāṇa I, 28.18. MUŚ reads *saṃpratibhāsate* as a single word.

³³ *ā viriñcāt pravṛttena bhraṇeṇājñānarūpiṇā* || *asad eva sadābhāsam idam ālakṣyate 'nagha* | YV, Nirvāṇa I, 29. 10-11.

³⁴ *na viśvam asti naivāstīn na ca nāma bhaviṣyati* | *idam ābhāsate śāntaṃ cidvyoma paramātmani* || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 260.79; See also MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 262.41

jagat svapnabhramābhāsam mṛgatṛṣṇāmbuvat sthītam | *asad evedam ābhāti satyapratyayakārye api* || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 189.8.

³⁵ *ābhāsamātram evāyaṃ tathā drśyātmako bhramaḥ* | *cakracāpe yathā bhānti nānāvarṇā nabho 'navaḥ* || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 282.65. For similar reference, see also YV, Nirvāṇa I, 28.13.

³⁶ *ādīto yad anutpannam na sambhavati karhicit* | *asadrūpam anābhāsam katham tad anubhūyate* || *asad eva sadābhāsam anutpannam akāraṇam* | *jāgrat svapnavad udbhūtam arthakṛc cānubhūyate* || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 190. 74-75.

forms.³⁷ This identification of the appearance with dream is not intended to reject appearance as such, but rather, this analogy is applied to confirm that appearance is in truth *ābhānamātra*, of the character only of awareness.³⁸ Explicitly, the application of dream in this interpretation of Advaita is not to negate entities by confirming their parallel to dream, but rather, it is to affirm their essential nature of awareness-only.

The interpretation of *ābhāsa* as an appearance of something else (*anyathā bhāsa*) in another form does not allow for the ontological aspect of that which appears in the state of illusion. The only meaning that can be established on the basis of this interpretation is the non-existing nature of the falsely appearing entities. However, there are other instances where the application of *ābhāsa* coincides with the scholastic Advaita understanding of *avidyā* as indeterminable of either existing or non-existing. Following this application, either the reality is confirmed as *cinmātra* and all that appears is due to *ābhāsa* and nothing is either real or false,³⁹ or with an application of *ābhāsamātra*, all that appears is merely appearance alone.⁴⁰

The MUŚ often describes the rise of the notion of the self in pure consciousness as the first step in the process of the emanation of the world. This metaphysical stance differs from the one that considers the rise of the notions of the self and other, and subject and object, as simultaneous. Following the first order, when the consciousness becomes conscious (*cetati*), it gives rise to the notion of the self, identified here as *cidābhāsa*.⁴¹ In this sequence, the self, having I-sense (*aham ātmā*), is found in the triadic form of subject, object, and cognition.⁴² It is noteworthy that the Advaita understanding, in which subject and object arise parallel to each other, aligns with the Buddhist concept wherein the rise of *dvaya* of the form of *grāhaka* and *grāhya* is simultaneous.

A stark difference between the Mahayana and Advaita applications of *ābhāsa* can be found in the application of the term *cidābhāsa* in the case of the second. This Advaita usage confirms consciousness, considered as changeless, to be foundational. However, the general application of *cidābhāsa* found in Advaita literature refers to

³⁷ *tena svapnavad ābhāsam idaṃ paśyati cinnabhaḥ | svarūpamātrakacanam ākāravad ivākulam || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 205.6.*

³⁸ *bhānaṃ bhāmātram ātmatvaṃ nijam yat tac cidātmanaḥ | nabhasā svapnaśabdena kathyate jagadākṛti || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 205.7.*

³⁹ For instance, see: *cinmātraṃ sarvam evedam itthaṃ ābhāsatāṃ gataṃ | neha satyam asatyam vā kvacid asti na kiñcana || YV, Nirvāṇa 12.23; na grhṇāti malaṃ bhūyas tāmratām iva kāñcanam | ābhāsamātram evedaṃ na san nāsaḥ jagattrayam || YV, Nirvāṇa 28.46*

sarvaṃ svābhāsam eveti samyagālokanam viduḥ | sadasanmayasaṃsāre yathābhūtārthadarśanāt || YV Nirvāṇa 28.49.

⁴⁰ *ābhāsamātram evedam itthaṃ evābhāsatē | dvicandravibhramākāram sad asac ca vyavasthitam || YV, Nirvāṇa 28.13.*

⁴¹ *taṃ cetati cidābhāsaṃ pūrvam ātmā svam ātmanā | tatra tanmayatāṃ dhatte tena tanmayarūpiṇīm || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 177.11. The term *cidābhāsa* is not found in the parallel reading in YV, Nirvāṇa II, 20.11.*

⁴² *aham ātmā trikoṇatvam upagacchati kalpanam | asad eva sadābhāsaṃ manyate cetanād vapuḥ || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 22.32.*

either *jīva* or the subject of consciousness. In agreement with this understanding, MUŚ describes the rise of *jīvahood* by comparing it with the ignition of lamps from one single lamp. In this metaphor, Prajāpati is compared to the first lamp that ignites others.⁴³ Following this description, it is due to the *ābhāsa* of Prajāpati that individual selves arise.⁴⁴ The commonly-found term *jīva* is interpreted, following the *ābhāsa* terminology, as *cidābhāsa*, with consciousness coming into contact with [lit. facing towards] the entities of awareness (*cetyonmukha*).⁴⁵

However, in the case of MUŚ/ YV, one can find the application of *cidābhāsa*, not only to address *jīva* as the appearance of pure consciousness, but also to explain the appearance of the world as all that appears, to be the very *ābhāsa* of consciousness. Furthermore, this application confirms Brahman, rather than negating the world.⁴⁶ This position takes for granted that there is no distinction between the object erroneously conceived and its substrate, the real object. The experience of the self in the body, when using *ābhāsa*, is explained in terms of *cittadoṣa* or ‘defilement of mind’ and is distinguished from *cidābhāsa*, where *cidābhāsa* describes the experience of the self in other than the body.⁴⁷ Following this understanding, it is sensation that gives rise to the notion of reality outside of consciousness. MUŚ compares this sensation to the vibration (*spanda*) caused by wind.⁴⁸ This rise of duality occurs when consciousness appears projected onto itself as if other (*prthag ivābhāsa*). The appearance of the other is of the character of determination (*saṅkalpa*) and imagination (*kalanā*). In this process, mind itself assumes form and appears in the form of the world.⁴⁹ Unlike the Mahayana application of *ābhāsa* as fundamentally false, and in alignment with the scholastic Advaita understanding of *avidyā* in which ignorance is not simply not knowing but rather the cosmic force that gives rise to the world, in some instances found in MUŚ/YV, this is the very *ābhāsa* that appears in various forms (*ākāra*). In this sense external entities are compared to the entities of dream, where mind projects the form of dream entities.⁵⁰ When *cidābhāsa* is identified with the objects of perception, it is often distinguished from the *ātman*, which appears in the form of the appearance of consciousness (*cidābhāsa*)

⁴³ *asmād udeti jīvālī dīpālī dīpakād iva || eṣa sa eva pūrvoktaḥ prajāpatir eva | sarveṣāṃ padārthānāṃ pracchandāḥ samaṣṭirūpaḥ ābhāsaḥ | bhavati | sarveṣāṃ ābhāsānām etatsvarūpatvāt |* MUŚ, Utpatti 14.10 and the commentary of Bhāskara thereon.

⁴⁴ *asmād eva pracchandāḥ jīvāḥ samprasaraty amī | asmāt prajāpatināṃnaḥ | pracchandāt ābhāsāt | amī pratyakṣaṃ sphuramānāḥ | jīvāḥ | samprasaranti sañcāraṃ yānti |* MUŚ, Utpatti 14.12 and Bhāskara’s commentary thereon.

⁴⁵ *evaṃvidham tat kalanam ātmano ’ṅgam akṛtrimam | cetyonmukhacidābhāsaṃ jīvaśabdena kathyate ||* YV, Nirvāṇa II, 188.2.

⁴⁶ *bhedo na bhedas tatrāyaṃ bhedo ’yaṃ yanmayāḥ kila | tad brahmaiva cidābhāsaṃ cidrūpaiva hi bhinnatā ||* YV, Nirvāṇa II, 129.18.

⁴⁷ *deho ’haṃ cittadoṣo ’yaṃ kim anyat paridīvyate | dehāc ced anya evāhaṃ cidābhāsaḥ tad aṅga he ||* YV, Nirvāṇa 29.59.

⁴⁸ MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 98.50.

⁴⁹ *tadā prthag ivābhāsaṃ saṅkalpakalanāmayam | mano bhavati viśvātmā bhāvayan svākṛtiṃ svayam ||* YV, Nirvāṇa I, 114.16.

⁵⁰ *ākārarāṣirūpeṇa bhūribhāvavikāriṇā | ābhāsa eva sphurati svapna eva mano nṛpa ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 124.29.

that gives rise to the notion of objects. This manifestation of plurality is pertinent to the very self, due to itself, and manifesting upon its own substrate.⁵¹ Whether applied only to refer to the subject of awareness or to both the subject and object of awareness, the application of *cidābhāsa* is definitely a development in the meaning found in early Mahayāna literature.

Congruent with Mahāyāna literature, some instances in MUŚ/YV confirm the positive being of mind in the absence of all entities of appearance. MUŚ/YV frequently utilizes the terms *anābhāsa* and *samasamābhāsa*, both referring to pure consciousness, free from modifications, and devoid of all the external images.⁵² Parallel to the application of *nirābhāsa* in LAS to refer to the highest state or the eighth consciousness (*viññāna*) in which sevenfold consciousness arises, MUŚ describes *anābhāsa* as the true nature of Brahman, the foundation for the rise of external objects.⁵³ This absence of external entities is also referred to with the identical term, *nirābhāsa* in a rare instance in MUŚ/YV that makes further comparison possible:

*ekam eva nirābhāsam acittvam ajaḍam samam |
na san nāsan na khaṃ nākham idam advayam avyayam ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa II, 33.34⁵⁴

[There exists] only *one* that is free from all appearances. [This *one* is] indifferent, neither conscious nor unconscious, neither existing nor non-existing, neither empty nor not empty. This [is] non-dual (*advaya*), and indestructible.

Instead of identifying this *nirābhāsa* state as ultimately existing (*sat*), this passage describes it as neither existing nor non-existing (*na san nāsan*), the terminology in scholastic Advaita that consistently refers to *avidyā*. This is also described as neither conscious nor unconscious. Although Brahman is not the subject of consciousness, scholastic Advaita consistently describes it as having the character of awareness. This apparent discrepancy can be resolved by the Advaita proclamation that Brahman is confirmed as existing only to reject non-existence, and the identification of awareness as its essential character is only in order to reject the absence of consciousness. MUŚ identifies this *nirābhāsa* as the state of yogin's mind compared to deep sleep (*suṣupta*), which, although is *nirābhāsa* or devoid of the instances of appearance, is the origin of all appearances.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *sargasyādau tathavedam ātmaiva svātmanātmani | vyomātmaiva cidābhāsam dṛśyam ity avabhāsate* || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 171.9.

⁵² See for instances, MUŚ Nirvāṇa 43.6; 44.3; 63.43; 100.26; 101.4; 124.31; 137.50; 161.30; 354.52.

For use of *samasamābhāsa*, see: MUŚ Nirvāṇa 2.24; 37.31; 46.17; 127.18; 354.26;

⁵³ For instance: *anākāram anādyantam anābhāsam anāmayam | śāntam cinmātram sanmātram brahmaivedam jagadvapuḥ ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 297.34; *sarvam apratigham śāntam jagad ekam cidambaram | anīganam anābhāsam ātmany evātmanāsyatām ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 301.78.

⁵⁴ MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 190.34. For the use of *nirābhāsa*, see also:

na cānādinirābhāsam nirākāram cidambaram | dṛśaḥ kāraṇam anyasyāḥ kvacid bhavitum arhati || Nirvāṇa 364.32.

⁵⁵ *tena yogī suṣuptātmā vyavahāry api śāntadhīḥ | āste brahma nirābhāsam sarvābhāsasamudgakaḥ ||* YV, Utpatti 10.26.

See also: *kāṣṭhamaunadaśābhāsam sansāram avaśiṣyate |* YV Nirvāṇa II, 42.25.

Abhāsa as Pure Consciousness

The above description establishes that, depending upon the context, the concept of *ābhāsa* confirms subjective illusionism, non-dual awareness, the monistic perspective of consciousness alone, or the non-substantial nature of all the entities that appear. Common to all these understandings is the notion that *ābhāsa* stands for something that is not real. This, however, is not the only application in which the term *ābhāsa* has been used. There are several instances where *ābhāsa* is used as synonymous to consciousness (*cid*). This position confirms the monistic perspective that illusion in form of subject and object or in form of the world has never occurred.

A general agreement among the schools applying the term *ābhāsa* is that it is *māyā* or *avidyā* that gives rise to duality. This, however, is not always the case, as shown by other instances of its occurrence in MUŚ. In some, *ābhāsa* is not caused due to ignorance but it is consciousness (*cid*) itself and without any external cause.⁵⁶ Following this understanding, the world in the form of time, space, and so on is compared to the momentary appearance of lightning, affirming that consciousness itself is momentarily appearing in the form of the external world.⁵⁷ Along these lines, it is this ‘shining’ (*bhās*) and not ‘false appearance’ of the very solitary awareness free from beginning and end, that gives rise to the concept of plurality.⁵⁸ The examples that agree with this specific understanding, wherein the objects of perception are considered as *ābhāsa*, as well as cognition or the absence of cognition, are identified with the same term *ābhāsa*.⁵⁹ In these instances, the application of *ābhāsa* is in order to confirm the existence of Brahman alone.

The apparent discrepancy in Advaita literature, where the world is identified at the same time with ignorance as well as Brahman, needs to be explored in order to demonstrate how MUŚ reconciles this contradiction. If the world is identical to Brahman, then, *ābhāsa* does not explain illusory nature, as there is no illusion as such. On the other hand, the world cannot be the very Brahman shining, if the world is a false projection of illusion. The text demonstrates awareness of this contradiction. MUŚ distinguishes these two positions and confirms that the first position, the negation of the world identified with error, functions as a pedagogical strategy to confirm the higher position that there exists only Brahman.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ YV, Nirvāṇa II, 195.45.

⁵⁷ *janayaty accham ābhāsam bhaṅguraṃ sphuraṅāt svataḥ | jagadrūpaṃ niśāvidyud iva cit kālakhādi ca* || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 134.2

⁵⁸ *evam ādyantarāhitam ekam evedam ātatam | ittham ābhāsate bhāsā svayā nānyāsti kalpanā* || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 136.12.

⁵⁹ *ābhāsamātram evedam drśyam ity avabudhyate . . . bhedo 'tra vāci na tv arthe tasmān nāsty eva bhinnatā* || YV, Nirvāṇa II, 103.14-16.

⁶⁰ *bhrāntir eveyam ābhāti jagadābhāsarūpiṇī | bhrāntir evāpi vā naiva brahmasattaiva kevalā* || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 350.2.

When *ābhāsa* is understood as ‘shining,’ or ‘illumination,’ the world is perceived as identical to Brahman. This concept rejects any origination and establishes *ekasattā*, the Advaitic stance that establishes a single degree of reality. Although rare in application, this specific position contrasts with the general agreement between the applications of the term *ābhāsa* found in Mahāyānic Advaya and Upaniṣadic Advaita. Following this position, the world and Brahman do not posit two different degrees of reality and *ābhāsamātra* in this context does not refer to the falsity of the world but rather to the self-aware nature of the Brahman:

*ananyac chāntam ābhāsamātram ākāśanirmalam |
brahmaiva jagat ity etad sarvaṃ sattvāvabodhataḥ ||*

YV, Utpatti 9.30⁶¹

With the knowledge of the reality (*sattva*), the world (*jagat*) is the very Brahman, [and] thus all of this [is] identical [to Brahman], in its essential form, of the character of consciousness only (*ābhāsamātra*) and free from impurities, such as the [clear] sky.⁶²

The application of the term *ābhāsamātra* in the above example is noteworthy, as this understanding is congruent with other instances where *cinmātra* or *dr̥ṣṭimātra* is instead applied. The interpretation of the term *ābhāsamātra* as ‘consciousness only’ is also supported by the commentary of Ānandabodhendra.⁶³ This understanding is found elsewhere, as in the following application of the term is in the sense of pure awareness:

*anādicinmātranabho yat tat kāraṇakāraṇam |
anantaṃ śāntam ābhāsamātram avyayam ātatam ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa II 82.4

The sky of the character of awareness only, free from beginning, is the cause of all the causes. This is endless, free from functionings, appearance only (*ābhāsamātra*), free from destruction, and all-pervading.

*evam ābhāsamātrasya kacato ’niśam avyayam |
sargādīmadhyāntadr̥ṣo mudhaivātroditāḥ sthitāḥ ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa 94.63

In this way, of this ‘appearance only’ (*ābhāsamātra*), which is forever shining and indestructible, the perceptions of the beginning, middle, and end of creation are falsely arising or existing in this [essential nature].

*bhittimātraṃ yathā citrajagad ālokaṃ mātrakam |
citi cidvyomamātrātma tathāivābhāsamātrakam ||*

⁶¹ MUŚ reads this verse as: . . . *ity eva satyaṃ satyāvabodhinaḥ || MUŚ, Utpatti 9.32.*

⁶² The commentary of Bhāskara on the *Mokṣopāya* thereon is also significant:

anena prasaṅgena jagadbrahmaṇoḥ aikyam eva punaḥ punaḥ kathayati [ananyac . . . {32}] jagat karṭr | ananyat sarvarūpatvena sthitatvāt svavyatiriktavasturahitam | śāntaṃ svarūpe viśrāntam | ābhāsamātra-kam ābhāsamātrasvarūpam | ākāśanirmalam ākāśavat svaccham | brahma eva bhavati | ity eva etad eva | satyāvabodhinaḥ satyajñānayuktasya | satyaṃ bhavati || The commentary of Bhāskara on MUŚ, Utpatti 9.32. For the commentary of Bhāskara on the Utpatti section of the MUŚ, see Walter Slaje, *Bhāskarakaṇṭhas Mokṣopāya-Ṭīkā: Die Fragmente des 3. (Utpatti-) Prakaraṇa*. Graz: EWS-Fachverlag, 1995.

⁶³ *ābhāsamātram cinmātram . . .* Tātparyaprakāśa commentary on YV, Utpatti 9.30.

YV, Nirvāṇa II, 168.6

As the world in a painting is merely the canvas alone, [comprised of] perception (*āloka*) only, in the same way, [the world is] only *ābhāsa*, of the character of the void of consciousness in consciousness [alone].

Further strengthening the aforementioned understanding of *ābhāsa* as pure consciousness with the self-aware nature of consciousness, MUŚ/YV uses this term as identical to the witnessing self (*sākṣin*), and it is considered as the foundation for the functions that gives rise to the notion of duality. As explained:

*sākṣiṇi sphāra ābhāse dhruve dīpa iva kriyāḥ |
sati yasmin pravartante cittehāḥ spandapūrvikāḥ ||*

YV, Utpatti 9.68⁶⁴

As in the existence of a lamp, actions [are revealed], in the existence of the unbound and witnessing awareness, the activities of mind manifest subsequent to the pulsation [of mind].

Remarkably, the witnessing self in this verse is identified as *ābhāsa*, in whose existence the functions of various forms occur. The metaphor of lamp given in this verse requires explanation. The verb ‘to illuminate’ (*pra+√kās*) is applied to describe the function of lamp. However, a lamp cannot be an agent of the action of illumination. The *ābhāsa* or shining of the witnessing self is considered to be the same. With this example of lamp, luminosity is explicitly of the character of awareness. This shining, or the active engagement of being aware of something, does not constitute duality of the self. The appearance of the world is what appears in this awareness itself, when *ābhāsa* is used to describe the world. In fact, *ābhāsa* is not the outward appearance, but the character of consciousness.⁶⁵ Along the lines of this interpretation, *nirābhāsa*, a state of mind free from agitation, denotes the state of *ābhāsa*, or the flashing of the character of the self.⁶⁶

This *ābhāsa* or illumination is considered as action only relative to the entity that it manifests. In one example where the concept of *ābhāsa* and *pratibimba* tally, this notion explicitly considers that something appears in the relative sense:

mukure cāmalābhāse pratibimbanam pravartate |

YV, Nirvāṇa I, 36.11

⁶⁴ Bhāskara’s commentary in this verse helps to clarify the metaphor of the lamp and the concept of witnessing self:

sākṣiṇi sarvāsāṃ staimityaspandāvasthānām grāhakatvena sākṣibhūte | sphāre vyāpake | ābhāse sphurattaikasāre | dhruve udāsīne | yasmin sati sannidhimātram bhajati sati | citrehāḥ nānāvidhāḥ manovyāpārāḥ | kathambhūtāḥ | spandapūrvikāḥ śarīraceṣṭāḥ | pravartante | tatsahitā ity arthaḥ | asati āntare kasmīn cīttatve vikalpānām śarīraceṣṭānām cotthānam yuktaṃ na syād iti bhāvaḥ | kā iva | kriyā iva lokakriyā iva | yathā dīpe sannidhimātram bhajati lokakriyā svayam eva pravartante | tathety arthaḥ || Bhāskara on MUŚ, Utpatti 9.70.

⁶⁵ *nūnam bodhe ’virūḍhasya nāhantā na jagatsthitiḥ || bhāsate paramābhāsarūpiṇaḥ kāpy avasthitiḥ |* YV, Nirvāṇa II, 45.59-60.

⁶⁶ *yaḥ prabuddho nirābhāsam param ābhāsam āgataḥ | svacchāntaḥkaraṇaḥ śāntas taṃ svabhāvaṃ sa paśyati ||* YV, Nirvāṇa II, 52.38.

Counter-image occurs in the shining mirror free from dust (*amala*).

Explicitly, it is the nature of mirror to reflect what is in front of its surface. This, however, does not mean that the mirror, ‘reflecting’ objects, is an agent of action that does certain activities. Congruent with this understanding, *ābhāsa* and *cid* are described as property and substance. Following one example found in MUŚ, just as gems have their radiance, so also is awareness endowed with worlds.⁶⁷ Creation, following this understanding, is identical to Brahman. This identity can be found described in terms of waves and the ocean, where the waves are, although considered to be different from and originated of the ocean, not separate from ocean itself.⁶⁸ This understanding of ‘as identical to Brahman’ helps explain verses like:

*dikkālādyanavacchinnarūpatvād ativistṛtam |
tad anādyantam ābhāsaṃ bhāsanīyavivarjitam ||*

YV, Utpatti 10.33

The Brahman {*tat*} is beginningless and endless and omnipresent (*ativistṛta*) because it is free from the limitations of space, time, and so on. [It is] *ābhāsa*,⁶⁹ devoid of entities to be illuminated.

This *ābhāsa* is described in terms of the supreme (*para*), one (*eka*), and unmade (*akṛtṛma*).⁷⁰ Also described as *sadābhāsa* and identified with *sat*, a synonym of the Brahman, it explains the awareness pertinent to liberated beings who have freed their minds from the entities of perception.⁷¹ Three terms, *sat*, *cid*, and *ābhāsa* describe this non-dual awareness that is free from modifications. This *ābhāsa*, identical to *sat*, is the foundation where *kalā* arises, which in turn gives rise to functionings. This non-dual *ābhāsa* and the rise of *kalā* are compared to water and the waves.⁷²

Congruent with the understanding of *ābhāsa* as awareness, this *ābhāsamātra* is *amala* or free from defilements, and is conscious of all sentient beings. This is Brahman, identical to awareness (*cid*).⁷³ *Cinmātra* or consciousness only as the highest principle, identical to *ābhāsa*, is explained in terms of self-awareness

⁶⁷ *kā nāma vimalābhāsās tasmīn paramacinmaṇau | na kacanti vicinvanti vicitrāṇi jaganti yāḥ ||* YV, Nirvāṇa 37.2.

⁶⁸ For instance, see MUŚ, Utpatti 9.71, and the commentary of Bhāskara thereon.

⁶⁹ For explanation of Bhāskara: . . . *bhāsanīyavivarjitam ābhāsaṃ jñeyarahitajñānasvarūpam ity arthaḥ ||* MUŚ, Utpatti, 10:33.

⁷⁰ *sampannaḥ śāntam ābhāsaṃ param ekam akṛtrimam | kvāstam etu kva vodetu kīdr̥gvapur asāv iti ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 155.11.

⁷¹ *dr̥śyād yo viratiṃ yāta ātmārāmaḥ śamaṃ gataḥ | sa sann eva sadābhāsaḥ paritr̥ṇabhavār̥ṇavaḥ ||* YV, Nirvāṇa II, 38.31.

⁷² *saṃvedyenāparāmr̥ṣṭam śāntam sarvātmakam ca yat | tat saccidābhāsamayam astīha kalanojjhitam || samudeti tatas tasmāt kalā kalanarūpiṇī ||* YV, Nirvāṇa I, 9.2-3.

⁷³ *ābhāsamātram amalaṃ sarvabhūtāvabodhakam || sarvatrāvasthitam śāntam cidbrahmety anubhūyate |* YV, Nirvāṇa I, 11.67-68.

(*svānubhūti*) and described as the immediate awareness in all instances.⁷⁴ These instances only verify that the application of *ābhāsa* in Advaita literature does not always confirm the illusory nature of entities that are described in terms of *ābhāsa*. These descriptions further function to portray the self-luminous nature of awareness, which in other instances is depicted in terms of *prakāśa* or *svaparakāśa*.⁷⁵

This *ābhāsa*, described as the essential nature, is undoubtedly the very Brahman, with the passage applying the term *ābhāsa* parallel to terms such as essence (*sāra*), unborn (*aja*), free from beginning and end (*ādyantaśūnya*), and one (*eka*).⁷⁶ This understanding of *ābhāsa* differs from the one that stands for illusory appearance in the sense that it is pure and is of the character of the self, free from mental modifications.⁷⁷ If this *ābhāsa* is understood as other than the awareness of the character of the self, it will be difficult to comprehend instances such as the following:

*yat saṃvedyavinirmuktaṃ saṃvedanam anirmitam |
cetyamuktaṃ cidābhāsaṃ tad viddhi paramaṃ padam ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa I 6.4

You should know the awareness that is free from the object of consciousness [and which is] not constructed, the *ābhāsa* of consciousness that is free from objects of consciousness as the highest stage (*pada*).

As in the instance above, *cidābhāsa* describes the very awareness itself with its inherent nature of shining. This *cidābhāsa* is free from mental modifications (*nirvikalpa*),⁷⁸ which further confirms that the meaning of *cidābhāsa* in this instance is different from the application of this term in scholastic Advaita.

As it has been pointed out, the term *ābhāsa* is used in two opposite senses: in the sense of pure awareness and to describe its self-luminous nature, and in the sense of false appearance. This understanding further complicates the reductive sense of meaning that can be derived from MUŚ/YV, where *ābhāsa* follows the scholastic Advaita understanding of false appearance. Particularly, one cannot escape from the influence of mainstream Advaita while reading commentaries on MUŚ/YV.⁷⁹ With

⁷⁴ *cinmātram amalābhāsaṃ kalākalanakalpanam | pratyakṣadr̥śyaṃ sarvatra svānubhūtimayātmakam ||* YV, Nirvāṇa I, 39. 18.

⁷⁵ This reading of *ābhāsa* can be further confirmed by the application of *ābhāsvara*:

bhuvanāḍambarādarśe cidā [tmānam upāsmāhe] | aciraskahakārāntam ābhāsvaram akhaṇḍitam || MUŚ Nirvāṇa 11.122.

⁷⁶ *ajam asaram anādyam buddham ādyantaśuddham śivam amalam ajalpaṃ sarvagaṃ śāntam ekam | bahir abahir apīśaṃ jñāṃ vinirmāṇam agryaṃ kam api tam upagamyam saram ābhāsam āhuḥ ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 155.37.

⁷⁷ *pratyakcetanam ābhāsaṃ śuddham saṅkalpavarjitam | agamyam enam ātmānam viddhi duṣṭadr̥śam iha ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 62.5.

⁷⁸ *tasmāt sāratarāt sārāḥ kiñcid anyan na vidyate | nirvikalpacidābhāsa eva sarvatra kāraṇam ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 135.25.

⁷⁹ The application of *ābhāsa* in the following verse where *sadābhāsa* is identical to *vyomātman* can be interpreted in the first sense, pure awareness. However the commentary of Bhāskara explains *ābhāsa* explicitly in the sense of illusory appearance:

this new understanding of *ābhāsa*, the necessity for an overarching philosophy that can resolve the contradictions within the single text becomes apparent. Arguably, the early Bhedābheda doctrine can resolve this apparent inconsistency. The foundation for this understanding is that duality and singularity are similar to the waves and the ocean: waves do not exist independent of the ocean and the duality seen in the perception of waves does not constitute duality when perceived as water.

Cinmātra and Ābhāsa in Light of the Concept of Bhedābheda

The biggest hermeneutical challenge posed by MUŚ/YV is to resolve the contradiction occurring with the application of terminology in which the same language sometimes refers to something non-substantial, essentially false, and illusory, or at other times refers to the highest reality, the only reality that exists. Textual interpretation of *ābhāsa* could take any direction, without one philosophical position that allows for multiple understandings. In particular, the understanding of *ābhāsa* as pure consciousness itself does not even seem possible if the *ābhāsa* model of the scholastic Advaita of Śaṅkara is followed.

This problem of textual interpretation can be resolved more easily if a different philosophical model is adopted as the foundation for the concept that permeates MUŚ/YV. The doctrine of Bhedābheda, assigned to Bhartṛprapañca, an Advaitin earlier than Śaṅkara, arguably, gives an easier philosophical model for the hermeneutical challenge the text poses. Following this model, *bheda*, or difference, and *abheda*, or the absence of difference, are not inherently contradictory. These are two modes of the same reality. Along these lines, *prapañca*, or verbal construction is what constitutes duality and *vilaya* or dissolution of such verbal construction, rejects the notion of duality.

This understanding also recognizes the Brahman's powers (*śakti*) to manifest in the form of the world, just as the ocean can take the shape of waves. This position does not reject the essential monistic position of the state in which there is no creation, that of pure Brahman itself. This position can be easily reconciled with the position of Maṇḍana which utilizes *prasāṅkhyāna* or mental reflection to resolve the difference that gives rise to the notion of duality. More appropriately, this position allows the active life to be a part of realization, as in the case of Janaka or Rāma, both kings and central characters in the philosophical epic, MUŚ/YV.

In order to confirm that, while adopting the concept of *ābhāsa* in the YV, there are nonetheless instances that support the notion of *bhedābheda*, it is contextual to analyze some passages. The application of *ābhāsa* to describe luminosity serves as a model to describe the world as an inherent nature of Brahman:

ardhonmīlitaḍṛgbhrūbhūmadhyatārakavaj jagat | vyomātmaiva sadābhāsaṃ svarūpaṃ yo 'bhīpaśyati ||
. . . sadābhāsaṃ sad ivābhāsata iti sadābhāsam | paramārthato na sad ity arthaḥ || MUŚ, Utpatti, 9.56.

It contradicts with the following application of *sadābhāsa*, if the meaning of this term is derived only following the lines of Bhāskara:

etat tat sadābhāsam etat prāpya na śocyate | puṣpasyāntar ivāmodaṃ prāṇasyāntar avasthitam || MUŚ,
Nirvāṇa 26.56.

*yathā dravatvaṃ salilaṃ spandatvaṃ pavano yathā |
yathā prakāśa ābhāso brahmaiva trijagat tathā ||*

YV, Utpatti 11.19

As the fluidity of water, the undulation (*spandana*) of wind, the luminosity (*ābhāsa*) of light, so is the world of Brahman.

Following this understanding, there is no actual dissolution of the world, as the world is the property of Brahman, just as luminosity inheres to light. For liberation, then, the individual recognizes its own essential nature. Here, *ābhāsa* is the nature of Brahman, like the light of the sun. The world is not once more assigned to ignorance. Again, explaining origination as verbal construction, the text compares the rise of the world in pure awareness to the ‘shining of the sun’ that permeates the sky. For the sun is light itself and is not shining or illuminating.⁸⁰

This description suggests that there is actually no origination, but not because what appears is illusion in its phenomenal sense, but because what is considered as originated and different from its cause is not different in reality. For instance:

*yathāmbhasatarāṅgādi yathā hemno ’ṅadādi ca |
tad evātat ivābhāsaṃ tathāhambhāvabhāvitaḥ ||*

YV, Nirvāṇa I, 112.6

As the waves etc. of water and as bracelet etc. of gold, the very [substance] appears as if not that. The same [is the case with] something imagined by I-sense.

The rejection of entities with an application of the term *ābhāsa* needs to be read in light of this stance, where negation functions only to reject duality due to linguistic construction.⁸¹ This understanding of *ābhāsa* aligns with the *ekasattā* doctrine that there exists only a single reality.⁸² In this context, the question then is, what is *ābhāsa*? MUŚ explains *ābhāsa* in terms of ‘*prthak cetanam ābhāsa*’ (appearance is to be aware differently).⁸³

And what is the liberated state in which there is no duality and no bondage? It is apparent that, in this understanding, having the world or not having the world is not what causes bondage. Rather, it is the false perception of difference. This, however, does not reject the non-dual state. Following the example of waves and water, just as

⁸⁰ *idaṃ tv acetyacinmātrabhānor bhānaṃ nabhaḥ prati | tathā sūkṣmaṃ yathā meghaṃ prati saṅkalpavāridaḥ || tu viśeṣe | acetyacinmātrabhānoḥ cetyādūṣitacitsūryasya | bhānaṃ ābhāsaḥ | idaṃ jagat |* MUŚ, Utpatti 15.11 and the commentary of Bhāskara. This metaphor of sun is found elsewhere as well: *taraṅgabhaṅgurāṅy antar bahiś cāvṛttimanti ca | ābhāsamātrarūpāni tejasy ātmavivasvataḥ ||* YV, Nirvāṇa II, 59.56.

⁸¹ The verse in the sequence of gold and ornaments where the existence of the other is rejected is: *tasmād anyan na tatrāsti yad asti ca sa eva tat | yac cānyat tattadābhāsaṃ na ca paśyati durmatih ||* YV, Nirvāṇa 112.18.

⁸² There is an explicit reference of *ekasattā* in MUŚ that tallies with this the examples discussed here: *br̥ṃhitā bharitākārā sattaikā pāramārthikī | ābhāsaḥ praspuraty evam abdhir ūrmyādibhir yathā ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 124.45.

⁸³ *prthak cetanam ābhāsaḥ saṃvid astīti niścaye | bhāvānām avikārāṅām bhrāntijānām abhāvanāt ||* MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 127.11.

there is calm water in the absence of waves, so also is there the essential consciousness only in which the world is dissolved.⁸⁴

Following the example of the waves caused by the breezes of the wind, the world is described in terms of *dr̥śyābhāsa* (appearance of the objects of perception).⁸⁵ To illuminate is the inherent nature of pure consciousness, and its shining is explained in terms of the worlds of waking or dreaming.⁸⁶ Duality in the form of the world and awareness in its essential nature are two aspects that are always present: the world appears when perceived in terms of world, and there is never the world but only consciousness when perceived in those terms.⁸⁷ Bondage and liberation are two perceptions: for the one who perceives bondage, he is bound, and for one who perceives liberation, he is liberated. There is no phenomenal change, but only the change in perception, because it is merely a verbal construction that creates duality in terms of the subject of experience, other subjects, and the world of experience.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Clearly, from the above description, select terminology is shared by different and sometimes contradictory philosophical positions. It cannot be argued that a term's meaning is found in its earliest historical occurrence, thus ruling out other possibilities. The case of *ābhāsa* explicitly compels multiple understandings of the same term. This again is directly antithetical to the argument that meaning can be reduced to a single understanding of a term found in one philosophy or one text, particularly YV. Although identified as one single text, YV displays multiple nuances of concepts, and the terms used preserve multiple meanings. However, it is not the intent of this paper to leave the meaning open-ended, for textual interpretation is possible only when certain terms provide certain meaning. The quest for an overarching philosophy that can allow apparent contradiction, in this case resolved by the concept of Bhedābheda, is an approach for deciphering textual meaning which can be established by peeling away the layers of history built up as texts accrue multiple understandings and embody apparent contradiction. The reduction of textual meaning to one single sense is not possible, as this analysis demonstrates, wherein the authors of texts employ crucial technical terms in their fluid sense and in that way, are not exact in their application of terms, metaphors, or examples. It is therefore not reasonable to interpret or translate texts in a reductive fashion without considering the

⁸⁴ *spandāmatāyām śāntāyām yathāspandaṃ jaladravaḥ | na veti jagadābhāsaṃ citaḥ prasaraṇaṃ tathā* || MUŚ, Nirvāṇa 169.27.

⁸⁵ *spandaśaktis tadicchedaṃ dr̥śyābhāsaṃ tanoti sã | sãkãrasya narasyecchã yathã vã kalpanãpuram* || MUŚ, Nirvãṇa 241.6.

⁸⁶ *śuddhã saṃvit svabhāvasthã yat svayaṃ bhãti bhãsvarã | tasyã bhãnasya tasyãsyã jãgratsvapnãbhidhãḥ kṛtãḥ* || YV, Nirvãṇa II, 143.16.

⁸⁷ *idaṃ tribhuvanãbhãsaṃ t̥dr̥saṃ bhãti sarvadã | śãntaṃ rãma samaṃ brahma neha nãnãsti kiñcana* || YV Nirvãṇa II, 212.15.

⁸⁸ *tvam ahaṃ jagad ityãdi śabdãrthaiḥ brahma brahmaṇi | śãntaṃ samasamãbhãsaṃ sthitam asthitam eva sat* || YV, Nirvãṇa II, 54.2.

overarching philosophy of the text, as the terms found in the text have to be congruent with the foundational thought the text provides. Just as the example of dream does not confirm the same philosophy although it is found equally in Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Advaita texts, so also is the case with the term *ābhāsa*. It is also explicit that a single text does not always use a term with the same meaning. Whether or not the term *ābhāsa* refers to false appearance, what is consistent in the case of YV is that the term is congruent with the philosophy of *cinmātra*, where the non-dual awareness in itself is free from the discourse of affirmation or negation.